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Man and His Mind

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) a French philosopher and scientist once said:

By space the universe encompasses and swallows me as an atom; by thought I encompass it.

Man has been created by God with two opposing yet complementary qualities: the spiritual and the physical. On the one hand is his mind, in respect of which he finds himself limitless. He can think anything he wishes; there are simply no boundaries to his thinking.

Yet, in his physical existence, man is extremely limited. He is bound by innumerable kinds of constraints. The greatest limiting factor which man faces is death. Death nullifies all greatness in man.

This is man's severest test. In all his apparent greatness, he must acknowledge how humble is his condition. Passing from a limitless to a limited environment he must acknowledge the confines within which he lives. He must accept restrictions in an atmosphere of freedom.

Man is constantly under trial in this world. To pass all tests, we must learn his practical limitations vis-à-vis his intellectual limitlessness. By so doing, he can save himself from all misapprehensions, and can exercise his free will in the sphere of reality.

So far as animals are concerned, their thinking capacity barely goes beyond the immediate needs of survival. They are, in this sense, like living machines. By contrast, the area of man's thinking is vast. The greatest test of humanity is to discover a balance between thinking and action.

Spiritual Unity

It gives me great pleasure to participate in this Festival of Spiritual Unity. It will, indeed, be a memorable moment in my life. I thank the organisers for having given me the opportunity to be present on this occasion.

The organisers of the festival deserve to be highly commended for having drawn up a programme which stresses the most important need of our time. Man's greatest need today is to be shown the path of spiritual unity. There is no other way to eliminate the disharmony existing in present day society which has resulted in so many intractable problems. May God accept this initiative on the part of the Festival's organizers. May He crown their efforts with success so that people everywhere may benefit from them.

It is generally said that in present times, the world has assumed the form of a global village. But this is only half the truth. Modern technology and communications have, of course, greatly reduced distances across the world. But the closeness thus produced is of a purely physical nature. Modern technology may have bridged certain gaps, bringing the external world closer together, but the task of bringing unity into the internal world has yet to be accomplished.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the present Festival of Spiritual Unity is a major step towards completing the remaining fifty percent of the task. Its aim is to turn the world into a global village, in the spiritual sense as it has already happened in the technical sense.

What is spiritual unity? Let us take a very simple example. When you live in a crowded settlement, the walls all around give you a sense of limitation. You experience the friction of living in close contact with others and you suffer from mental tension. Later, when you emerge from that dense human settlement into open, natural surroundings you immediately feel that your tension has evaporated and you have once again become serene. You feel that you have joined a limitless universality. The feeling of separateness is replaced by an all-pervasive feeling of unity. You immediately become part of a world where there are no boundaries. A sense of universality prevails.

We have all had this experience at one time or another. It shows us what spiritual unity is. It is, in fact, the raising of one's existence to a higher plane. The moment you achieve this, you feel you are emerging from a limited world to become a citizen of an unlimited world. Disunity now disappears, giving way to unity all around.

Although, physically, all human beings appear to be different, spiritually they are one. It is as if spiritual unity between human beings already exists, it does not have to be externally imposed. We have only to make people aware of its existence. Once the outer, artificial veils are removed, what remains will be pure spirituality.

In reality, the various sets of circumstances that confront man in this world lead to drawing of different veils over man's natural propensities. For instance, the veil of material greed produces self-centredness; the veil of jealousy causes him to see himself as being separate from others; the veil of prejudice causes him to discriminate between human beings, and so on.

These veils, in fact, tend to block man's natural urge towards spiritual unity. What is required is to remove these artificial veils in order that the true, inner reality be brought into focus.

The aim of all religions, basically, is to encourage this spiritual unity within man and between man and man. No religion is at variance with another so far as this goal is concerned. The language in which this is set forth may vary from one religion to another, but, without doubt, the main concern of all religions is to produce spiritual unity within and between all human beings. Without spiritual unity, there is little hope of creating peace and harmony throughout the world. And where there is no peace and harmony, the dream of human progress will for ever remain elusive.

Now, what is Islam's contribution to spiritual unity? The subject is too vast for more than just a few basic points to be briefly touched on.

THE UNITY OF GOD

The most important factor in Islam's contribution is its concept of monotheism – of there being only one God (2:163). According to Islam, God, or the ultimate reality of this universe is only one – called Allah in Islam. It is implicit in the concept of the oneness of Godhead that differences and multiplicity would appear to exist in reality, yet there is an underlying unity.

In this way the concept of divine unity engenders spiritual unity. All human beings are one, because they are the servants of one God. All human beings are God's family. God is indeed the greatest reality of the universe. And when it is acknowledged that there is only one greatest reality, it is but natural that all other creation should acquire the character of unity.

THE UNITY OF NATURE

The Qur'an states that "There is no changing in God's creation." (30:30) According to the Prophet of Islam 'every child is born with an upright nature.' (Al-Bukhari) We learn from this that unity is found among all human beings at the level of nature and creation. Nature forms the common constituent in the creation of human beings, just as the atom forms the common constituent in all the varied objects of nature in the physical world. That is to say that the same unity which exists in the external world at the physical level, has existed among human beings at the spiritual level from the outset.

But man tends at times to be oblivious of his own nature. This is no less true in the sphere of unity. Today people are unaware of their spiritual potential. In such a situation, the easiest way to bring about

spiritual unity is to make men aware of that potential. The moment they became aware of it, spiritual unity will come into existence of its own accord.

THE UNITY OF MANKIND

The Qur'an says, "O Men, have fear of your Lord, who created you from a single soul. From that soul He created its mate, and through them, He scattered the earth with countless men and women." (4: 1)

This shows that men and women have been created from the same substance. Their being physically one, of necessity, demands their spiritual oneness.

Making a similar point, the Prophet Muhammad said that all human beings are brothers (Abu Dawud). This gives rise to the concept of a common brotherhood, and without doubt, it is this sense of brotherhood which generates the strongest feeling of oneness and togetherness among different people.

That is to say that when all human beings in this world are virtually blood brothers, they must, as this concept necessarily demands, live as brothers in spirit too. Any other way of living is a deviation from the reality.

I should like to refer here to an incident which illustrates this point. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda went to Chicago to participate in the Parliament of Religions. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* puts it, his was a 'Sensational appearance.' (15/623) On that occasion all the speakers at the conference followed the common practice of addressing the audience as "Ladies and gentlemen." But when Swami Vivekananda took the stage, he addressed his hearers as "Sisters and brothers of America." No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the hall resounded with a long burst of applause. Of all the delegates at the conference, Swamiji received the greatest ovation.

The reason for this was that the form of address, "Ladies and gentlemen" produces a sense of alienation and strangeness, whereas the phrase "Sisters and Brothers" introduces a note of closeness and familiarity. By using this phrase, Swami Vivekananda touched a cord in the hearts of those of different creeds and colours. Their natural feeling of unity was awakened, and then what ensued fulfilled the best of expectations. All of a sudden, the gaps between them were bridged. They all began to feel themselves what they really were, and for that moment, physical divisions disappeared and were replaced by a rare spiritual unity.

Making due preparation before taking action

When Abu Bakr decided to wage war against the Byzantines, he conferred with certain of the Prophet's companions, several of whom gave him their opinions. "O successor of the Prophet," said Khalid ibn Said, "It is not for us to disobey you, or to differ among ourselves. When you tell us to go out, we shall go; when you give an order, we shall obey it." Pleased by this response, Abu Bakr told Bilal to announce that they would go ahead with the war against the Byzantines. People then began to gather in preparation for the campaign. One day, Abu Bakr came along with a number of other companions to where the troops were camping, and noted that the number who had assembled to fight in the Byzantine war was quite considerable. But they did not think that even this number would be really effective against the Byzantines and, when Abu Bakr once again sought advice, Umar declared that he did not think the number sufficient. Accordingly, the departure of the army was delayed, while a letter was written to Yemen for reinforcement.

Good Society

A good society is the cherished ideal of every human soul. But a consensus has yet to emerge on what constitutes a good society. This is undoubtedly one of the most complex questions facing us today.

It would be no exaggeration to say that three major initiatives, designed in their separate ways to offer a solution, have been utter failures. A hundred years ago it was generally assumed that the setting up of a national government would provide the answer. It was felt that it was foreign rule which was responsible for the rot that had set in society, and that indigenous rule alone could set matters right. We did finally succeed in establishing a national government in 1947, but it failed to yield the desired result – a good society.

Similarly, the initiative which led up to home rule, i.e. the non-violent movement started seventy five years ago by Mahatma Gandhi, did not usher in any utopian ideal. It had come to be assumed that once the principle of non-violence became the mainstay of Indian politics, it would automatically be put into practice in society. But this transference of a principle from the political to the social sphere did not take place. We may have been successful in launching a political movement based on non-violence, but we were to find that it took more than earnest enunciation of the principle of nonviolence to build a good society.

The third initiative, carried out after independence, was the attempt to bring about a good society by legislation. There are now scores of laws aimed at social reform, each social evil having several specially framed laws to itself. But this multitude of laws has done little to bring a good society into existence.

As I see it, our basic shortcoming is to think purely in terms of system. This has caused us to devote all our attention to overall social reform, at the expense of the more worthwhile reform of individuals. Over a period of a hundred years, all the major movements launched in our country have been system-based, rather than individual-based.

The individual is the primary unit of society. If individuals are reformed, society follows suit. And if individuals degenerate, society too goes into a decline. That is why our best efforts should centre around the individual, who is, after all, the basic building block of society. The day we reform individuals in their thousands and tens of thousands we shall have set ourselves well and truly on the path of successful social reform.

The solution to our problems lie in Muslim-Hindu meeting, instead of Muslim-ruler meeting. The most urgent need of today is to hold a Hindu-Muslim dialogue at All India level. Serious minded and influential people from both the communities should participate in this meeting. Its goal should be the securing of peace on the basis of purely non-political grounds.

The representatives of both communities should hold discussions with open hearts. They must strive to put an end to controversial situation on both sides and they should discover a common basis by adopting which both the communities can live together as good neighbours.

A dialogue of this kind is exactly in accordance with the Islamic shariah. The Hudaybiya peace treaty in Islamic history is an instance of a successful dialogue of this nature. After the Prophet's emigration in 622 the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims had been considerably deteriorated in ancient Arabia. A number of battles and skirmishes ensued, walls of prejudice and hatred barred one another coming closer.

Finally the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, had to stay for about two weeks at Hudaybiyya near Mecca in 628. Here began negotiations with non-Muslims Meccan leaders. And then according to most of their conditions a peace treaty was signed between Muslims and non-Muslims known as Hudaybiyya treat in the Islamic history.

If such a dialogue is held with full justice and sincerity, a new chapter will be opened in the history of India. It is this point of Hindu Muslim relationship where the history of India is standing still. Once this problem is solved and the relations between the two communities normalized, nothing else will come in the way of India's progress.

The dialogue, if it has to succeed, should not take the form of polemics. They should not become spokesmen of their respective communities during the discussion what should be uppermost in their minds is vaster national interest and that what is the path of betterness for all the communities.

Both the parties will have to commit themselves for differentiating between issues and non-issues that they will not hold any matter as prestige issue; that they will not adopt the way of claim and counter claim; that they will say anything keeping the result before them; that their way will be one of impartiality; that while pressing their demands they will also be willing to concede that while taking from other they will also be willing to give.

Dialogue is not a meeting of rivalry but is a brotherly meeting. Such noble tasks are performed by rising above the defeat-victory psychology. Its aim is to solve the matter and not confound it. The feeling at work behind dialogue is one of reconciliation and not one of rivalry.

Dialogue means an attempt to solve the controversial matter through negotiation rather than through confrontation If a dialogue is started with this spirit its success is certain. The door to the progress of our country is shut for about half a century. And a dialogue keeping this spirit in view can surely open the closed door provided it is conducted with true spirit. (211:7)

Two Words

Sir Arthur Eddington, the well-known scientist, writes in his book, *The Nature of the Physical World*: "I have drawn up my chairs to my two tables. There are duplicates of every object. One of these tables is comparatively permanent. It is substantial. Table no 2 is my scientific table. My scientific table is mostly emptiness. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed."

This description could be applied equally to the entire universe. It is especially true of our world, which has two aspects to it: appearance and reality.

What we see around us, we call the world. But there is also the other invisible world of the Hereafter. When death comes, it means leaving the visible, or apparent world to enter into the invisible, or concealed, but nevertheless real world of the Hereafter.

While the present world in which we live is visible to everyone, the next world lies behind a veil and is unobservable. That is why man makes the mistake of regarding only the present world as real and the other world as imaginary. Even those who profess to believe in the Hereafter think of it as an abstract concept with no actual relevance to their present life. That is why, in spite of believing in it as an article of faith, they do not allow it to influence their material existence in any way.

This is man's greatest omission. Engrossed with this ephemeral world, he fails to realize that on the day he leaves this world for the next, eternal world, it will be as if a veil has been removed. And on that day, he will regret his negligence. But regret will serve no useful purpose. He will have lost tomorrow for today.

Just as it is the true scientist who can see 'two tables' it is the true servant of God who can discover the 'two worlds.' And it is he and he alone who, by the grace of God, will enter victoriously into the divine Paradise of the Almighty.

Losers can be Gainers

An elderly holy man living in a small town in northern India, once had the misfortune to witness the constant harassment of an outsider who had come there to take up residence. Just because he belonged to another community, he was subjected to all kinds of unfair treatment. When matters escalated, it became a point of communal prestige. Not wishing their untoward behaviours to be seen by others as such, the townspeople began to twist the story so that the whole blame would fall upon the outsider, while they themselves appeared entirely innocent.

However when the holy man was asked about what had really happened, he simply told the truth, that the townspeople were the wrongdoers and that the outsider was their victim.

At this, all the townspeople became enraged at the holy man, but he uttered no word of reproof, and carried on with his daily routine as if nothing had happened. Finally, one of the townspeople came to him one day and asked him why he was maintaining such a strict silence when so much was being said against him. He wanted to know if he was not worried at the infamy that was being heaped upon him. The holy man replied that there was no just cause for worry. "If I am quite content, it is because these people are distributing my sins among themselves. They are, in fact, taking the burden of my sins upon their own selves. Thus enabling me to enter into the next world, free of all burdens. Later, he narrated a *hadith* in which according to Abu Hurayrah – the Prophet once asked: 'Do you know who is poor?' His companions replied that the poor man amongst them was the one who had no money and no possessions. Then the Prophet said: "The poor man in my community (*ummah*) is one who comes on Doomsday with his prayers, fasts and *zakat*, but who, despite all his seeming piety, had abused people, made false accusations, appropriated others, and acted like a tyrant. Then all his virtues will be given to those he had oppressed. And when all his virtues have been used up without his account having been cleared - there still being some of the oppressed who have to be compensated by his virtues, – then the sins of the oppressed will be transferred to him, whereupon he will be thrown into hellfire."'

This *hadith* is a stern warning to all those who treat others with cruelty, who commit acts of appropriation and usurpation, and who indulge in calumny and defamation. Even the virtues of such individuals will not stand them in good stead on the Day of Judgement. And if, on that day, they can give no evidence of having performed good deeds, they will be fated to bear the burden of others' sins along with their own.

Conversely, this *hadith* gives consolation to the oppressed. Those who have been treated unjustly may live in the expectation that their sins will be transferred to their oppressors, while they themselves, rid of all that burden, will be allowed to enter heaven. But it should be borne in mind that this blessing will await only those who remained patient under oppression for the sake of God.

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(211:13)

The Matter of Life

All the things in the market are available on the payment of necessary price. The principle of the market, to be precise, is: you receive as much as you give neither more nor less. This principle is true for the entire human life as well. Someone has aptly said: 'give the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you.'

If you are well-wisher of others, others will also respond the same way. If you talk to others gently, others too will return gentle words. If you honour others, others too will honour you.

This is a world of give and take. Here man finds only what he has given to others. In short others will behave with you just as you behave with them.

This means that in order to lead a life in this world, finding good atmosphere is in one's own power. You become friends of others and everyone will become your friend. You bear with the unpleasantness of others then you will find people around you who bear with the unpleasant thing from you. You benefit others and then you will find a world where everyone will be busy benefiting others.

If you want to live like a flower you will find your way to a bed of flowers. But if your existence is replete with thorns, you will find a world full of thorny shrubs.

Constant fear of God

The second Caliph of Islam, Umar ibn Khattab once wrote a letter to Abu Musa Ash'ari, offering him this advice: "Remain ever in fear of God; and learn the Book of God, for it is the source of all knowledge; for weary hearts, it is the freshness of spring."

(Al-Dhahak)

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(199:14-17)

Hindu Muslim Dialogue

In his book *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Dr. Syed Abid Hussain (1896-1978) pointed out that the revolution culminating in India after 1947 wrought certain basic changes in the social and political situation in India. But now that India is a democratic system, Indian Muslims are still living in the past dictatorial age. It is this backwardness of thought on their part which is the basic, underlying reason for all of their problems.

Prior to 1947 during the British period the Muslims were faced with a government which was not answerable to the public. It enjoyed the position of a supreme arbiter which was able to take any action whatsoever without taking the public's approval into consideration. But now that India is a democracy, the present rulers have to take public opinion into account. Under such circumstances Muslims must now try to solve their problems through the people, instead of the rulers. Abid Hussain says: "But Muslims still labour under the impression that the solution to their problems is in the hands of the Government. To the Government alone they take their troubles and from it alone they expect a remedy." (p. 295)

This review of the recent history of Indian Muslims is very apt. The movement launched in the name of Ayodhya's Babri Masjid serves as the worst example of it. The way the incompetent Muslim leaders led this movement after 1986 amounted to adopting a path of confrontation vis-à-vis their Hindu counterparts on this issue. And Muslims, very naively indeed, believed that the government would come to their assistance, as it was its responsibility to do so, and that, in its capacity as supreme arbiter, the government would give its verdict in favour of Muslims.

But the event of December 6, 1992, revealed that this supposition was totally baseless. In his speech on August 15, 1992, the Prime Minister of India had proclaimed that he would not allow the demolition of the Babri Masjid. In December he dispatched a 20-thousand strong police force to the border of Ayodhya, besides making a number of other official arrangements. But, in reality, what happened was what the public wanted. On December 6 the Kar Sevaks forced their entry into the Babri Masjid and demolished it. Afterwards they removed the debris in order to build a makeshift Ram Mandir on exactly the same spot. Furthermore, they managed to secure permission from the Court of Law to place idols of Ram Lalla in this new mandir in order to start darshan and puja.

This incident is a clear indication of the public's supremacy over the government. It IS a final proof of the fact that in this country it is the public which enjoys a superior position, and not the individuals who

have been elected by the people to form ministries for a limited period of time. Now only a person totally bereft of sanity can believe that the central government, which could not save the historical structure of the Babri mosque from demolition, would be bold enough to demolish the newly erected makeshift mandir, remove the idols of Ram placed therein, and then rebuild a Babri Masjid on exactly the same site.

Most surprisingly indeed, even this incident, though it was as clear as daylight, could not puncture the unawareness of the incompetent Muslim leaders. As, We learnt from the newspapers, on April 5, 1993, about twenty well-known members of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board arrived in New Delhi in order to draft a memorandum by consensus. This memorandum demanded that the government remove the present makeshift mandir of Ayodhya and the idols placed therein, and rebuild the Babri Masjid on the former site. Afterwards this delegation met Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao, to hand over the memorandum to him.

This is no doubt the worst example of anachronism. The greater lesson that Muslims should have learnt from the 6th December incident was to turn towards the Hindu Janata, that their efforts should all be directed to the Hindu Janata rather than to the rulers of Delhi. But how strange it is that the unwise Muslim leaders are still engaged in circumambulating Delhi.

Given the state of affairs, the Muslim Personal Law Board's meeting with the Prime Minister to press the demand for rebuilding the mosque at the same site is incomprehensible. Only their supreme unawareness can account for it. They are still living and thinking in the India of fifty years ago. They have yet to grasp that India is at present being ruled by the Indian people and not by an absolute dictator.

Now it is high time that Muslims change their ways. Instead of looking up to government or administration they should look up to the Hindu public. The Muslim leaders should meet the Hindu leaders. The Muslim people should develop contacts with the Hindu people. Opportunities for Hindu-Muslim meetings should be created at every level in order that misunderstandings against one another can be removed, mutual tensions eased and both communities can start living together harmoniously.

Prosperity the greatest trial

Saad ibn Abi Waqqas records the Prophet as saying: "More than the affliction of hardship, it is the affliction of prosperity that I fear on your account. When you were afflicted by hardship, you showed great forbearance; but as for the world, it is overly sweet and luscious."

According to Auf ibn Malik, the Prophet also said: "You will be showered with worldly riches, so much so that if you stray, it will be precisely because of them."

(at-Tabarani)

(212:7)

A Period of Twenty Five Years

Albert Sabin, an American scientist was born in 1906 in Poland. His parents migrated to America when he was only fifteen years old and it was here that he died on March, 93. After a long and hard struggle spanning over a period of twenty five years he succeeded in inventing a polio vaccine which could be used orally. Whereas hitherto it was generally given by means of injections. It is estimated that about 500 million people have so far benefitted from this invention.

Yet Albert Sabin, a truly deserving candidate, was denied of the Nobel Prize. Still he did not fret himself to death. Instead he said: I only ask for a place of work.

During the course of his research he had to suffer from great frustrations, but without being affected from his failures he continued to engage himself devotedly to his research work, ultimately his research reached to its successful conclusion. He used to say: "No matter how good you are, you can not be a scientist unless you learn to live with frustrations."

This is also a general principle of success in this world. Here any great success awaits only that courageous person who can devote himself to his work unceasingly for a period of twenty five years; who can continue his onward journey through frustrations; who can rise again after every fall; who can always remain active for the attainment of its goal whether or not he receives recognition and applause.

Those who complain of non-recognition and applause at unfavourable circumstances; whose eyes are set on problems rather than on opportunities can never attain their goal in life.

(211:10)

Take Away the Justification

India's freedom movement can be divided into two stages: from 1857 to 1920, and from 1920 to 1947. It is a well known fact that, during the first period, the British government dealt ruthlessly with the freedom fighters and that, after 1920, that same British government ceased all violence. There is only one way to explain this. In the first phase, the freedom movement had been marked by violence. But after 1920, when Mahatma Gandhi came on the scene, he proclaimed that the freedom movement would be entirely non-violent.

When Mahatma Gandhi shunned the violence, the British government perforce did likewise. This is because the use of violence inevitably requires some form of justification. The former freedom fighters, by resorting to violence, were only playing into the hands of the British who then had no scruples about retaliating with violence. When they refrained from violence, they left the British with no grounds for brutal reprisals. Baffled by Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of non-violence, an English collector sent this telegram to the secretariat: Kindly wire instructions how to kill a tiger non-violently.

There are certain groups in India who suggest that communal problems may be solved by resorting to active 'self-defence.' But that would only aggravate the situation. It is in no sense a solution. The only certain way of tackling such problems is to deprive the oppressor of any justification for his oppressive conduct. Provocation should be seen as a ruse to spur the victim on to that very retaliation which will be seized upon as a pretext for further attacks. As such, it should be ignored. There should be no reaction, no retaliation. In that way, no oppressor can continue to oppress. Even with a gun in his hand, he will lack the moral courage to pull the trigger.

(211:11)

Freedom of Thought

New Yorker Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) was famous for his political and journalistic writing. His book *Public Opinion*, the first edition of which was published in 1922, received wide acclaim for its emphasis on the adoption of a psychological approach in politics.

Widely read for the seriousness of his thinking, Zippmann once observed that "When all think alike, no one thinks very much."

Although very simply worded, this observation makes an important point. With all the many things and ideas in this world to be known and thought about, people's thinking, if left uncurbed, will in its totality make a substantial contribution to the progress of living. But in an atmosphere where people are expected to think along the same lines, their cumulative thought will be shallow, lacking in content, and in no way conducive to the furtherance of knowledge. The latter is a social phenomenon which has come to be known as 'intellectual dwarfism.'

When people are free to think in their own individual ways, this will certainly result in differences in the quality and content of their thought, and they will be bound to criticise each other's viewpoints. Any opposition to criticism per se can only result in a thwarting of intellectual progress. In this world, the option is not between criticism and silence, but between criticism and intellectual stagnation. If an end is put to criticism, humanity will descend into a state of mental atrophy. Conversely, where criticism is welcomed there will be healthy, intellectual development.

Your Skin will Speak out...

Man's skin, according to the Qur'an, will testify against him on the Day of Judgement: 'On the Day when Allah's opponents are gathered together they will be driven into the Fire. So that when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will testify to their deeds. "Why did you speak against us?" they will say to their skins, and their skins will reply: "Allah, who gives speech to all things, ~as made us speak. It was He who in the beginning created you, and to Him you shall all return. You did not hide yourselves, so that your eyes and ears and skins could not observe you. Yet you thought that Allah did not know much of what you did. It is this illusion concerning your Lord that has ruined you, so that you are now among the lost'" (41:19-23).

Until recently the idea of skin being capable of 'speaking' was very difficult for man to understand. Recent progress in scientific research, however, has made it much easier to see how this will happen. A UPI report published in *The Times of India* (May 30, 1984) disclosed this startling discovery: 'Skin speech – communicating through vibrations on the skin – offers promise as a future alternative to hearing aids or surgical implants for those with impaired hearing, a speech and hearing scientist has said. Dr. Arlene Carney, audiologist at the University of Illinois, said that 'skin speech' involves the use of tactile devices that electronically create speech patterns in vibrations on the skin. 'Patients receiving the experimental therapy learn to interpret the vibrations and sort them into speech patterns,' said Dr. Carney.

It is well-known that words emitted through the mouth are preserved in the atmosphere in the form of sound waves. This sound actually originates in vibrations, much the same as the vibrations that cause skin speech, which are transmitted in the form of wave motions through a material medium such as air. These waves remain in the atmosphere. Though they cannot be seen, they do not disappear. They are there, and, were the apparatus available, could be played back like a tape on which sounds have been recorded.

If this is true of vibrations that cause sound speech, then it is also clearly true of the vibrations that cause skin speech.

These vibrations are likewise preserved in the atmosphere. Man, who even in this world possesses the ability to play back sounds recorded on a disc or tape, should have no difficulty in understanding this power being extended by the Almighty in the next world to cover all vibrations, whether of sound or skin speech, which have been imprinted in the atmosphere in the form of waves.

Man is being tested in this world. No scientific discovery reveals the exact nature of divine truth for, were it to do so, man would have no choice but to accept it: there would be no test involved. However,

advances in the field of science do make it easier for us to understand certain concepts, such as skin speech, which were difficult to fathom in the past. If the fast-accumulating evidence in support of truths expounded in the Qur'an is not sufficient to make man take heed, then he shall have to wait for actual occurrences before he will come to his senses. But then it will be too late; for then there will be no choice but listen to the evidence of everything – even our skins – and accept the fate to which it condemns us.

Honest partners have a third partner in God

The Prophet said: "So long as two partners working together do not deceive each other, they have a third partner in God, but when one deceives the other, God departs from them and the devil comes between them."

(211:12)

Anger

Albetano, an ancient Roman philosopher, is recorded as having said: 'The angry man always thinks he can do more than he can.'

When a man is intoxicated with alcohol, he is not in control of himself He may even go so far as to bang his head on a stone, unmindful of the fact that it may not be the stone that breaks but his own head. This is because, in his besotted state, he wrongly gauges his own abilities and proceeds to do things which can have unfavourable consequences.

The same is true of the angry man. In a towering rage, a man is not in control of himself He overestimates his own capabilities, as a result of which he involves himself in activities which are beyond his powers of control. He realizes his foolishness only when his temper has cooled. But, by that time, the wrong step has been taken and destruction has followed in its wake. It is now too late for regrets: he is unable to save himself from his own wrong action.

In India, one very glaring example of such misjudgement becomes evident in the ongoing conflict between the Muslims and the police. It repeatedly happens that, for some reason or the other, Muslims became enraged with the police, and then they clash with them. This invariably results in the Muslims coming to grief. The reason that the clash takes place at all is that, because the Muslims became so irate, they do not stop to compare their own strength with that of the armed constabulary. If they were to think about the situation coolly, they would make a true estimate of their own strength, and that in itself would be enough to prevent them from clashing with the police. Anger blinds them to the reality of their own weakness, they start fighting with forces superior to their own, and the result is that they – the Muslims – are the sufferers.

The moral of this is that one should never do anything of any importance when in an angry mood. Steps to counter adversaries should be taken only after all anger has subsided. This will mean fewer setbacks and more successes in life.

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(196:10)

A Report

The Christian church has conducted a study on the spread of different religions over the world. One part of this review, published by *Christianity Today* magazine (March 1992), reported that "since 1934, Islam has grown by 500 percent and Christianity by 47 percent. Both religions have about a billion followers, followed by Hinduism with 500 million followers, Buddhism with 245 million followers and Judaism with about 15 million followers."

According to this review, 60 years ago, the followers of Christianity were far more in number than the followers of Islam. But today their numbers are almost equal. If this pace continues, the Muslims will certainly outnumber the adherents of all other religions.

However, just an increase in numbers is no reason for great rejoicing. Along with this there must be provision for their training and education. Today, Muslims are behind in education everywhere. Aligarh Muslim College established a hundred years ago and later developed as a University, is the pride of the Muslims. They take enormous pride in saying that this Muslim University is not just an institution but a movement. Yet a recent review has revealed that in the villages on the outskirts of Aligarh district there is a mere two per cent of the Muslims who can be classed as educated (*Statesman*, April 12, 92).

This is a clear indication of how much work there still remains to be done.

Everything is a Matter of Trial

Describing an incident in the life of the Prophet Moses, the Qur'an states:

The elders of Pharaoh's nation said: 'Will you allow Moses and his people to commit evil in the land and to forsake you and your gods?' He replied: 'We will put their sons to death and spare only their daughters. We shall yet triumph over them.'

Moses said to his people: 'Seek help in God and be patient. The earth is God's; He gives it to those of His servants whom He chooses. Happy shall be the lot of the righteous.'

They replied: 'We were oppressed before you came to us, and oppressed we still remain.' He said: 'Your Lord will perchance destroy your enemies and make you rulers in the land. Then lie will see how you conduct yourselves.' (7:127-129)

We learn from these verses that the Israelites, subjected to too much cruelty and injustice, complained about it to Moses, the Prophet of their time. Yet the Prophet Moses did not tell them to solve their problems through protest and demand and confrontation. He told them rather that it was all God's doing and that they should, instead of complaining, turn to God in patience and prayer.

The Israelites reacted by asking what use it was his being a prophet. They had thought that with the emergence of a Prophet amongst them they would be blessed with power and honour. But this had not happened, and while the very reverse was happening to them, they were simply asked to remain patient; Moses then told them that the wielding of political power also demanded patience. This was because, by granting power to man, God intended to see how he would behave when invested with power.

The actual problem for human beings in this world does not relate to having or not having power. The actual crux of the matter is how good a performance man puts up in any given set of circumstances.

The present world is one of trial and the next world is that of reward. As such, man must focus always on maintaining the highest standards of behaviour regardless of the external circumstances.

(211:14)

The Cause

It is a fact that Indian Muslims are lagging behind Hindus in education and economic advancement. In explaining this a Hindu intellectual writes:

'Hindus have prospered in independent India because their religion adopted the road to modernity and progress, while Muslims remained backward because their religion turned its gaze towards the past' (*The Times of India*, February 27, 1994).

It is true that Muslims are lagging behind Hindus, but this explanation is far from the truth. Islam never leads one to turn one's gaze towards the past and overlook matters of progress. The real cause of Muslims' backwardness in modern times is traceable to wrong guidance by incompetent leaders, not to Islam.

The truth of the matter is that in modern times along with the emergence of science and technology, Muslims were beginning to lose their political power and cultural superiority. The western nations who had brought progress and advancement to the world were also those who had overpowered the Muslims all over the world and brought them under their own political and cultural domination.

Our leaders of this period, launched political movements all over the world against western nations. They hated the western nations and taught Muslims to hate them.

It was this hatred which came in the way of Muslims' advancement in the field of modern science and technology. The reason for Muslims' backwardness in modern times is not Islam, but that artificial hatred which our unwise leaders had fostered among Muslims. This hatred obstructed Muslims from looking at the western nations without prejudice, and prevented them from accepting the developments the west had given to the world.

(196:12)

Inevitable Problem

The writings of Anne Bronte (1820-49), an English writer, reflect realism. 'One of her sayings is: 'There is always a 'but' in this imperfect world.'

This is a wise saying. The present world is devised for the purpose of human trial. That is why the ideal state is not achievable here. Different kinds of limitations mark this worldly existence. Here, man being free in his speech and actions, there are repeated clashes of interest. That is why no one is able to achieve a friction-free life. Here one is always faced with a 'but' in one's way. It is therefore essential for man to take ground realities into account in planning his activities. If he fails to do so, he will be a miserable failure.

You are free to drive your vehicle at top speed on the street. But you do not have it in your power to free the street of all the vehicles heading towards you from the opposite direction: You are free to make a bid to stop an oncoming procession, but you do not have it in your power to keep the armed police from interfering. You can hold rallies and processions for any issue concerning your own community, but it is impossible for you to stop counter-reactions among the rival group. On the issue of denial of your rights, you can launch fiery movements in protest, but you do not have the means to change the law of the world that man can receive only that which is commensurate with his abilities.

There are barricades of 'buts' everywhere in this world. Acknowledge that such barricades exist and plan your actions accordingly. If you overlook this factor, then nothing but destruction will await you.

(203:4)

The Harm of Greed

According to Sufyan, Umar ibn Khattab once asked Kaab who the people of enlightenment were. Kaab replied that they were men who practised their learning. When Umar asked what caused a diminution of enlightenment in the hearts of scholars, Kaab replied that greed was to blame for this. (*Mishkat al-Masabih* 1/88)

The common man's greed is confined solely to money – more and more money, primarily to meet all his requirement, but progressively to enable him to lead a luxurious life. Similarly, one who wields celebrity in his own home create dreams of finding fame and fortune all over the world. The public figure who has thousands of followers will not rest content until his followers number in millions. And so on.

It is feeling of greed which makes a man of knowledge and learning into a pragmatist. In his heart, he may believe in the truth, but what he says in public bears little relation to it. Instead of upholding principles, he opts for expediency. He has one face in private and another face in public. He behaves in this way so that his image is not distorted, his popularity with the public remains undiminished, his interests are not damaged and he maintains his high position in the material world. By resorting to such duplicity, he ensures that his public image will grow constantly in stature. But all this is to be had only at the cost of constant inner erosion.

Being punctilious in paying people their dues

Abdullah ibn Umar records the Prophet as saying: "Pay a labourer his wages before his sweat has dried."

(Ibn Majah, *Sunan*)

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(203:5)

Conquering Oneself

Edmund Hillary, born on July 2, 1919, in Aukland, New Zealand, showed an early interest in mountaineering. He started by climbing mountains in his own country and later, in 1951, attempted along with a team to scale the heights of Mount Everest, a 29,028 foot high peak in Nepal. This attempt was not successful. Then, for the second time in 1953 he again set out to climb it with a British team. His guide in this venture was a Nepali, Tenzing Norway. Reaching the summit of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953, he became the first person to set foot on the highest point of the globe. He immediately became all over the world, and received a knighthood on July 16 of the same year.

He subsequently wrote a book on this mountaineering exploit, published in 1955 under the title *if High Adventure*. One of the lessons of this book is that, "it is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves."

This sounds very simple, but it is a remark of great profundity. It would be true to say that every victory in this world is the result of conquering one's own self. Each conquest necessarily entails a hard struggle. But, first and foremost, the aspirant to success must prove himself equal to that initial struggle, then he must show his unflagging determination to reach his ultimate goal. Only then will the world acclaim him as a conqueror.

Be it mountaineering or any other exploit, man has first to pass the test of a hard struggle. He must then prove that he is capable of exercising patience and restraint. The day a man furnishes proof of this ability, is the day that he will stand victorious, for all the world to see, on the highest pinnacle of success.

(203:15)

A Lesson from History

In his speech on October 5, 1991, George Bush, the former American President said:

"One cannot separate foreign policy and military issues from economic growth and reform. The world has seen only too clearly the immense costs of over-armed, aggressive states such as Iraq. It has also seen how excessive focus upon projecting politico-military power and neglecting the economy has badly, perhaps permanently damaged the USSR."

In the present world at times it becomes a matter of necessity to use force. But the use of force should be resorted to only when absolutely necessary, and then only temporarily. Excessive focus upon accumulating military power is useful neither for individuals nor for nations; neither for minipowers nor for superpowers.

No one is powerful enough to keep pace with both targets of economic progress and military power at the same time. Spending more resources on military power is always at the cost of neglecting the front of economic progress. Such a policy inevitably brings dangerous results, examples of which can be found in both distant and recent history.

Peace should form the general policy and war should only be an exception. The best and most correct policy for any individual or nation is to set matters right in all dealings with others through peaceful means. The way of clash and confrontation should be adopted only occasionally in emergencies.

(203:9)

A Law of Nature

Every misfortune that befalls the earth, or your own persons, is ordained before We bring it into being. That is easy enough for God; so that you may not grieve for the good things you miss, or be overjoyed at what you gain. God does not love the haughty, the vainglorious; nor those who, being niggardly themselves, enjoin others to be niggardly also. (57:22-23)

These words of the Qur'an tell us a law of nature. For those who have learned this law, loss becomes as meaningful as gain.

This world – in which everyone is free – has been devised by God for the purpose of testing mankind. Here, everyone is passed through different situations, favourable as well as unfavourable, so that he can be tested from every aspect, and so that his reactions and performance may be seen in different sets of circumstances. It must be borne in mind that the ups and downs of circumstances are a law of nature, which never changes for anyone.

One will be faced in this world with both kinds of experience – of loss as well as gain; at the individual as well as at the national level. But neither is gain success in this world nor is loss deprivation. Both situations serve the purpose of the divine test. Man should, therefore, not lose heart at his losses, taking them as deprivation, and similarly, his gains should never make him proud and arrogant by his taking them as matters of honour and prestige.

Man must in both sets of situations react with moderation. Apparent success should give him food for thought and apparent failure should increase his spirituality. None of these happenings should disturb his mind in such a way as to render him incapable of positive thinking.